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Statement
by

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at

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Your Excellency Minister Soimi, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy to be here today and have the honour to convey greetings from the UN Secretary-General. It gives me great pleasure to speak at this Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit Conference on behalf of my organization, the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). In fact, UNECE and Rovaniemi already have some wonderful history together. It was at the "Metsa2013" conference that we co-organized in this very city that our member States adopted the Rovaniemi Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy – a very important and practical document for sustainable forest management throughout the pan-European region. UNECE also has close links with the Arctic Council. We have observer status, and all eight countries are UNECE member States. So it feels like I am coming back to see friends. I believe this Conference will be an excellent opportunity to explore how we can deepen our collaboration even more, towards a sustainable Arctic.

The Arctic region is under considerable pressure, most importantly from climate change. The 50-year global monthly average temperature has been rising continuously since 1964. Last March we already measured two degrees above pre-industrial levels. If we continue on the current path, we will not reach the two degree target of the Paris Agreement, but are more likely to end up at four to six degrees, as the recent UN report on climate change noted. In the Arctic, melting permafrost impacts settlements and infrastructure. Biodiversity

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and the traditional lifestyles of indigenous populations are threatened. Only urgent action can reverse this trend.

The Arctic region has great importance for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 22% of the world's oil and natural gas could be located beneath the Arctic; the same for large quantities of valuable minerals. While we consider this rich endowment of resources, we must keep future generations in mind. I applaud this event and the ambition to ensure that these resources are developed in a sustainable manner, and with due regard for the SDGs. As I affirmed last month to Finland's Minister of Environment, His Excellency Kimmo Tiilikainen, UNECE stands with the Arctic Council. We are committed to working with all eight member States to support your efforts.

UNECE is a normative organization where member States gather to develop standards, legal instruments, guidelines and best practices in many different sectors. All our work is guided by the 2030 Agenda and geared towards supporting the implementation of the SDGs. I would like to present some examples of how we can help you achieve Arctic sustainability.

UNECE contributes to preventing pollution, in the Arctic and beyond. Most prominently, we host several multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), which are in force to help achieve cleaner air, access to safe and unpolluted drinking water, and also to avoid pollution from industrial sites.

Air pollution is an important factor in the melting of Arctic ice. One such pollutant is black carbon: small dark particles that land on the ice and change the albedo, thus causing accelerated

melting. And of course, these particles are emitted by non-Arctic States as well: Air pollution travels across borders. Therefore, it is important to reduce black carbon emissions throughout the region. This is a priority for the **UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention**), which covers 51 countries including all the Arctic States. I hope that you will all work with us to implement it.

I also want to mention the **Batumi Action for Cleaner Air**, or BACA for short. This is an initiative supporting countries' efforts in improving air quality and protecting public health and ecosystems. Ministers endorsed BACA at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Georgia last year. So far, about 100 voluntary commitments were received, from about 30 countries and organizations including three Arctic States. I encourage all countries and organizations here to use this platform, both to showcase their commitments and to share their best practices for clean air.

Another area where UNECE can help is **boreal forests**. After oceans, these form the world's largest biome. Their vital role cannot be understated: they sequester CO2 from the atmosphere, house a plethora of plants and animals, and provide substantial amounts of wood for lumber and biofuel production. They are also one of the ecosystems most affected by climate change. Increased wildfires, outbreaks of dangerous insects and thawing permafrost augment the risk of forest improverishment or change to grassland or shrubland. Non-

forestry industrial development can also reinforce these negative impacts. We must transition to adaptive forest management to secure the sustainability of boreal forests. UNECE provides guidelines and recommendations to enable this transition.

UNECE member States house 100% of the world's boreal forests. We cooperate intensively with these countries on the **preparation of an outlook for forests**, focusing in particular on issues related to climate change. I already mentioned the **Rovaniemi Action plan for Forests in a Green Economy**, which functions as a blueprint to support a forest and forest products-based bioeconomy. To take this even further, UNECE and FAO adopted in October the Warsaw Integrated Programme of Work on Forests. It covers key aspects of the management of boreal forests. We look forward to working with you to implement it. In this context, a key meeting of our Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry will be in Vancouver in autumn 2018. I hope to see you all there, to ensure that due attention is given to the issue of boreal forests.

Finally, a few words about **energy**. UNECE advocates a multi-prong approach to attaining the sustainable energy system enshrined in SDG7. 80% of today's energy is fossil-based. This percentage will not fall below 40%, even in a two degree scenario. Yes, we should deploy technologies for energy efficiency and renewable energy. To mitigate energy's contribution to climate change, we should also work on advanced fossil technology, carbon capture and storage, and

nuclear power. UNECE provides the guidelines, best practices and frameworks that can help. A couple of examples:

The permafrost in the Arctic is retreating. Permafrost keeps vast quantities of methane hydrates from evaporating. If these are released, the consequences could be dramatic, both on the environment and on climate change. Methane is responsible for 27 percent of global warming. UNECE identifies best practices in **managing methane emissions from energy-related extractive activities**. This can make an important near-term contribution. In fact, the UN Economic and Social Council has invited all countries to consider applying our Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Drainage and Use in Coal Mines.

Energy and mineral production is likely to increase in the Arctic due to receding ice cover. Successful and sustainable management of these resources requires good information on the resource base and adequate framework conditions. The **UN Framework Classification for Resources (UNFC)** developed by UNECE can be a valuable sustainable management tool for the region. Using UNFC, development can be undertaken with due regard for social and environmental aspects. This includes reducing wastes from mining, preserving land and water resources, and increasing efficiencies through comprehensive recovery. Finland, Norway and Sweden have partnered to develop guidance for applying UNFC to mineral resources in these countries. We therefore have a good basis to extend this work to the Arctic region and would be pleased to help this process.

Saving the Arctic is saving the planet. Let's all work together for Arctic sustainability.

Thank you.

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